

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

## HOW TO MAKE AN AIR COMMANDO

by

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## **Biography**

Lieutenant Colonel Haberichter is currently a student at the Air War College. He was previously assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Operations Squadron, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) where he served as the Squadron Commander. He was commissioned through the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) in 1989. Lt Colonel Haberichter earned a Bachelor's degree in Physics from the University of Iowa – Iowa City, Iowa and a Master of Military Arts and Sciences from Air Command and Staff College – Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas in 2004. He has deployed in support of Operations Autumn Return, Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn.

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*“Air Force special operations is experiencing a phenomenon of budget growth, while most of the rest will decrease in size...I congratulate you on your past accomplishments and I look forward to your future.”*

-General Larry D. Welch, 22 May 1990,  
speaking to the members of the newly  
designated Air Force Special Operations  
Command 21 years ago

## Introduction

Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) has experienced a rapid growth in personnel and airframes over the last five years with even greater growth programmed over the next 10 years. With no selection and assessment program for the majority of the force<sup>1</sup>, recruits have come from across the force and experience levels from within the conventional Air Force with no ability for AFSOC to match capability and maturity to the unique special operations mission. This creates a twofold problem; an influx of eager, yet technically immature candidates that are often operating under an incorrect preconceived notion of what special operations truly is. While weapon systems specific training is the path to capability and technical competence, only experience can meet the challenges of maturity and judgment. In years past, even before AFSOC was activated as a major command (MAJCOM), Air Force special operations forces (AFSOF) had the luxury of selecting mature (both age and psyche) members. As each of the services draw down their overall personnel numbers, that luxury no longer exists. As the old saying goes “beggars can't be choosers.” AFSOF is one of the few mission areas that is growing as the majority of the Air Force shrinks. So the question is: How can AFSOC inculcate the Air Commando ethos and organizational culture rapidly and efficiently while simultaneously

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1. This study purposely excludes the Special Tactics career field as they do have a selection and assessment pipeline that imposes significant physical and academic requirements. The primary focus of this paper is geared towards operational aircrews, but the recommendations could and should be applied towards the majority of the personnel force assigned to AFSOC.

increasing the mission set, and inventory, while also maintaining a high ops tempo in a low density force? This paper will lay out a three-phase program that will introduce, indoctrinate and sustain the desired organizational culture of AFSOC.

## The Problem

American Special Operations Forces (SOF) are the victims of their own success.

Deployed immediately after 9/11 to combat Al Qaeda and then the Taliban, US SOF quickly became the weapon of choice in the eyes of many in the Department of Defense (DOD) and Congress. The battlefield victories enjoyed by a relatively small specialized force opened the world of SOF to the accolades and scrutiny of a public that previously had little knowledge or exposure.

Misapplying the old adage that “if some is good, surely more must be better” well meaning advocates immediately began calling for more SOF. The legislative affairs office at US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) began fielding an onslaught of Congressional inquiries about topics like Special Forces (SF) troop strengths, throughput of the Naval Special Warfare training pipeline, and the cost of producing a special operator.<sup>2</sup> The gist of all the inquiries was “what could Congress do to increase the end strength of special operations?” More to the point, Congress saw the potential uses for SOF worldwide and they wanted the force increases quickly. This was problematic because it ran counter to several of the basic tenets that have made SOF effective.

USSOCOM and each of its components have held fast to the four SOF Truths for many years regarding the basic structure of the force. These Truths have been around since 1987 and

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2. The author spent the first six months of his assignment at HQ USSOCOM in the Special Operations Legislative Affairs (SOLA) Office.

in fact began as the five SOF Truths.<sup>3</sup> Admiral Olson, the current SOCOM commander, recently added the lost fifth SOF Truth that was part of the original list.

1. Humans are more important than hardware.
2. SOF cannot be mass produced.
3. Quality is better than quantity.
4. Competent SOF cannot be created rapidly after emergencies occur.
5. Most special operations require non-SOF support.<sup>4</sup>

The military leadership throughout USSOCOM already knew what their civilian leaders were calling for to be true: the number of special operators around the world had to increase. The operations tempo (OPSTEMPO) was already taking its toll on the force and it was becoming clear that in order to defeat the enemy there were a great many more interests in the world that required SOF's attention. USSOCOM's challenge was to accomplish the growth without sacrificing quality and yet somehow the timeline demanded that these warriors be mass produced.

The increase was formally directed in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). In order to win the war on terrorism the Chairman's assessment said the DOD would "train additional Special Operations Forces and enable traditional ground forces to conduct foreign training and security missions in addition to combat operations...[allowing] SOF to undertake

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3. Collins, *U.S. Special Operations – Personal Opinions*, 3. The five SOF Truths originally appeared in 1987 in a House Armed Services Committee report entitled US and Soviet Special Operations. There were conceived by a man named John M Collins, a retired Army Colonel. Though not a special operator himself, Collins had extensive access to the leading minds in special operations as well as numerous studies of historical events. Collins was quoted at a 2008 Speech to the 1st Special Warfare Training Group as saying that the SOF Truths are "still solid as bricks, but wish that whoever enshrined the first four had retained Number 5, which says 'Most Special Operations require non-SOF assistance.' That oversight was a serious mistake in my opinion, because its omission encourages unrealistic expectations by poorly tutored employers and perpetuates a counterproductive "us versus everybody else" attitude by excessively gung ho members of the SOF community."

4 . Ibid.

longer duration, high intensity tasks and augment[s] the irregular warfare capability of the entire force.”<sup>5</sup> Specifically spelled out as decisions were:<sup>6</sup>

- Increase (starting in Fiscal Year 2007) active duty Special Forces(SF) Battalions by one-third
- Expand Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) and Civil Affairs units by 3,700 personnel (33% increase)
- Establish a Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC) composed of 2,600 Marines and Navy personnel
- Increase SEAL Team force levels
- Establish a SOF unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) squadron
- Enhance capabilities to support SOF insertion and extraction into denied areas from strategic distances

Those directives account for approximately 10,000 additional personnel specifically in the ground SOF realm in contrast to a single AFSOC UAV squadron. Unfortunately the QDR only generally addressed enhancing capabilities, not capacity, in the arena of insertion and extraction. While the phrase “strategic distances” suggests aerial delivery, nothing about the QDR decisions mandated growth in AFSOC lift or strike capability – or Special Tactics (ST) Personnel for that matter. Additionally, the portion of the QDR dedicated to Joint Air Capabilities centered on conventional strike characteristics and capacity, and the Joint Mobility section makes no mention of enabling SOF or penetrating denied areas.

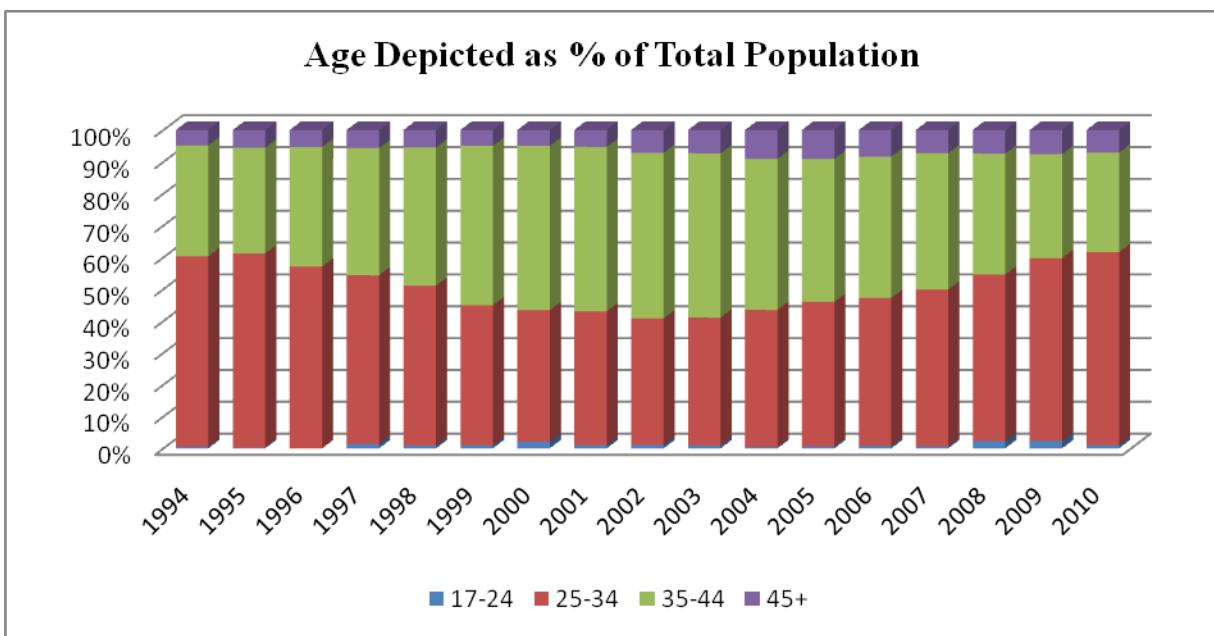
Fortunately, AFSOC leadership at the time recognized the strain that already existed on the SOF air component. Realizing the long lead time necessary for aviation acquisition and modification, AFSOC, in conjunction with SOCOM, developed several intermediate and long

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5. 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report, A-4.

6. Ibid, 44-45.

range plans for growth to accommodate the looming increased requirement in capacity for SOF-specific mobility, strike and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms. The growth led to the addition of a second base and wing,<sup>7</sup> the creation of a numbered Air Force within the command, fifteen new squadrons, and a major shift away from the predominantly C-130 based force. This didn't happen overnight, but the impetus of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and the efficiency of the SOCOM acquisition process outpaced the historical accession process. As can be seen in Figure 1, the age composition of AFSOC Airmen began to change significantly in 2005.



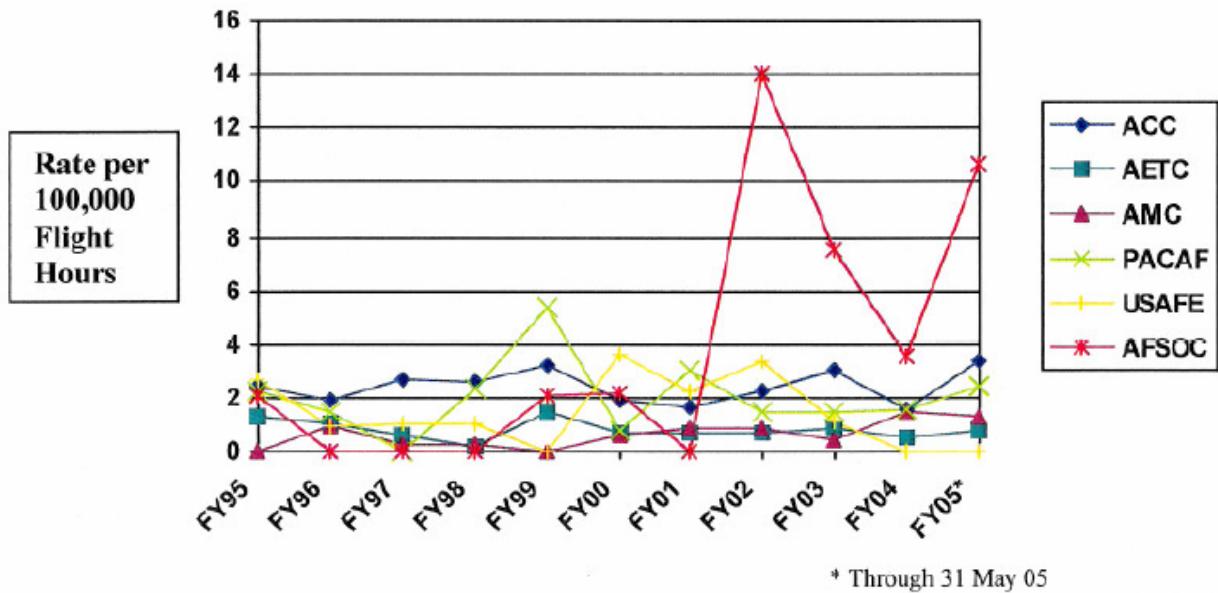
**Figure 1. Rated officer population in AFSOC by age, FY94-10<sup>8</sup>**

7. Up to this point AFSOC only “owned” a single base – Hurlburt Field – and was a tenant at all of its other locations. This kept infrastructure numbers low, but forced AFSOF units to always rely on conventional AF organizations for base operating support (BOS) functions. The acceptance of Cannon AFB was a major step for the command that necessitated the “overnight” inclusion of nearly an entire base worth of non-SOF personnel. People that in some cases had never participated in a joint operation let alone special operations were suddenly considered Air Commandos.

8. Data represented includes the Special Operations Pilot (11S) and Special Operations Combat Systems Officer (12S) career fields. Due to AFSC conventions these are the only two rated positions, officer or enlisted that can easily be identified as SOF. Enlisted AFSCs for flight engineers, loadmasters, gunners and sensor operators are not coded as special operators and rely upon special experience identifiers (SEI) as well as assignment information to

Source: Retrieved online from AFPC IDEA System, Feb 2011

While age alone is not an absolute indicator of maturity or experience, several other indicators caused concern beginning in the 2002-05 timeframe. Most important were the declining safety trends. Aircraft mishaps were high and AFSOC was well above the desired Air Force rate of 1.49 (See Figure 2). Though some of the incidents could be attributed to the war and high operations tempo, too many occurred during normal training missions. The straw that broke the command's back was 31 March 2005 the crash of an MC-130H while conducting training in Albania. Lieutenant General Michael Wooley, then AFSOC commander, directed a top to bottom critical review of the AFSOC mission.



**Figure 2. MAJCOM Class A Flight Mishap Rate Comparison**  
Source: AFSOC Safety Analysis Team Mishap Review Report, 16 Sep 05

The obvious question that arises out of this discussion is why was organizational culture important with regards to this data? Why wasn't this simply an issue of safety or flying training?

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distinguish them as current SOF. The higher numbers of younger officers in the mid 90's can likely be attributed to the creation and subsequent rapid growth of the command beginning in May 1990.

To deftly duck that question for the moment let it suffice to say “because AFSOC said so.” The command began with safety stand downs and procedural reviews and changes, but there was much more. A two-year study was undertaken by the Chief of Operational Psychology at AFSOC, Colonel Carroll Greene.<sup>9</sup> The topic of that study was the organizational culture of AFSOC, and the near term outcome was the command’s first attempt to influence that culture. AFSOC attempted to codify what it was to be an Air Commando by defining the 13 *Critical Attributes of Success*.<sup>10</sup> The list was released after “more than 175 highly experienced and respected AFSOC Air Commandos”<sup>11</sup> were consulted on two general questions:<sup>12</sup>

1. What are the qualities that distinguish an AFSOC Airman - from those who would be considered "average"?
2. What factors will make peers and leaders alike respect you as a leader, warrior - and critical member of the Air Commando team?

It was a well intentioned campaign that was accompanied by posters for each of the attributes describing how they applied to the Air Commando with inspiring photographic examples. Unfortunately the campaign fell short. The campaign just didn’t resound with the troops primarily because the *Critical Attributes* of the Air Commando could just as easily apply

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9. Hoffman, “*To Hell With the Paperwork*,” 4.

10. Lt. Gen. Donald Wurster, *Commander’s Message*, <http://www.afsoc.af.mil/library/criticalattributes.asp>. The 13 Attributes were prescriptive in nature attempting to define successful behavior in what many perceived as a checklist fashion. The attributes are, Integrity, Self-Motivation, Intelligence, Self-Discipline, Perseverance, Adaptability, Maturity, Judgment, Selflessness, Leadership, Skilled, Physical Fitness, and Family Strength.

11. Ibid.

12 . Ibid.

to any Airman or for that matter Marine, Sailor or Soldier. They failed to make the connection to what makes SOF “special” – why are Air Commandos different?<sup>13</sup>

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13. The author was a newly arrived DO in an overseas squadron when the first Critical Attribute poster and its display stand arrived. The stand was bent and the poster was damaged in shipping. The other twelve posters were never received and the stand and its lone poster remained outside the commander’s office for two years.

## What is Organizational Culture and Why is it Important?

There is an entire field devoted to the study and definition of organizational culture and absolutely too much literature to accommodate the scope of this paper. Instead, this chapter will strive to find a working definition of organizational culture and its importance to the military and SOF specifically.

Simply put, organizational culture is what the organization and its members believe about itself and its environment and the member norms as they operate in that environment. This is an intentional oversimplification designed to bound an enormous field of research. Edgar Schein is one standout who some considered the father of corporate culture. He defines organizational culture as “the basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and ought to be that a group of people share and that determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and their overt behavior.”<sup>14</sup> He also divides organizational culture into these three levels:

1. Artifacts.
2. Values.
3. Assumptions.<sup>15</sup>

Artifacts are the most visible and often tangible objects that the organization relies on as a touchstone of its identity. They are those things that can be held up to the uninitiated to say “this is who we are.” Uniform items, slogans and creeds, rituals and personal interactions, some might even argue actual airframes and ones identification with that specific mission qualify as artifacts. Even history is an artifact. All of these can often be easily identified by an outsider.

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14. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 224.

15. Ibid.

Values are what the organization—both leadership and members—openly state as the professed culture. Statements like “Mission first, family always” or “Anytime, Anyplace” are similar to slogans but they carry a sense of mantra and purpose. These statements are typically made internally to the organization with its members as the target audience.

Assumptions are the true values that the organization believes and represents, sometimes unknowingly. These assumptions may not match the professed values of the organization and they may be so deeply rooted in the psyche of the organization that they unknowingly affect decision processes.

These levels are important because modifying the first two levels rarely leads to lasting or substantial change in the organization and, in theory, can cause more damage when they conflict with the third level. Organizations that say one thing but subconsciously believe something to the contrary create internal turmoil.

Dr. Robert Spulak and Dr. Jessica Glicken Turnley are two scholars who have done a significant amount of work regarding culture and the military. In their separate studies of SOCOM and SOF they both at one time or another sought to answer a fundamental question; What makes special operations “special” and how does the identity of the special operator impact that? They both make significant remarks regarding behavioral versus character traits. Turnley found that “When viewed from outside, the specialness of SOF often gets characterized as behavioral, rather than character, traits.”<sup>16</sup> The critical importance she highlights is that “Character traits are indicators of the potential for certain types of behavior. *Behavior can be learned through training and other mechanisms*” (emphasis added).<sup>17</sup> Spulak in that same vein theorizes that the majority of SOF are special because of character traits and thus rigorous

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16. Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value*, 14.

17. Ibid.

screening programs such as the SF Qualification Course (Q-Course) and Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training are necessary to weed out those applicants that lack the character traits proven necessary for the job. He quickly counters himself with one exception. “AFSOF do[es] exhibit the creativity and flexibility of other services’ SOF. Not all of that is due to platforms or doctrine.”<sup>18</sup> He further elaborates that by volunteering for duties in AFSOC an individual self-selects, bringing with him/her the necessary and desired traits for the job.<sup>19</sup> Finally, he states: “The physical attributes may be less important in defining the distribution of AFSOF pilots, but other important attributes are certainly self-selected. *Another, perhaps more important, factor is the culture of SOF that nurtures and develops the appropriate attributes even after selection*” (emphasis added).<sup>20</sup>

To sum up:

- Character traits equal the potential for certain behaviors while behavioral traits can be taught.
- Most SOF finds character traits essential to selection but AFSOF is the exception relying on self selection.
- Most importantly culture is critical in nurturing desirable traits.

So if AFSOF survives and thrives when members display appropriate behavioral traits, and those traits can be taught and nurtured by SOF culture, then clearly defining organizational culture and ensuring that it is shared by all members is crucial to AFSOC’s success.

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18. Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 12.

19. This line of thought presumes that an individual who volunteers to join AFSOC is fully aware of the mission and all of its peculiarities. Two points quickly come to mind: 1) Not everyone who is accessed by AFSOC is a volunteer and 2) In order to maximize the number of volunteers with the “right” traits AFSOC should begin an extensive recruiting campaign within the conventional AF with maximum disclosure of airframe mission specifics.

20. Spulak, 12.

## What is the Air Commando Culture?

This thesis expands on a study accomplished in 2008 by then Major Justin R. Hoffman and much of the logic presented previously mirrors his research process. Hoffman sought to define the Air Commando culture in his Naval Post Graduate thesis. He defined the characteristics specific to Air Commandos through three questions;

1. What is the background of the founders and others who followed them?
2. How did the organization respond to crises or other critical events, and what was the learning from these experiences?
3. Who are considered deviant in the culture? How does the organization respond to them?

The distillation of his evaluations revealed “three overwhelming themes [that] emerged regarding the basic assumptions and beliefs of the Air Commandos...[suggesting] how they negotiated their external environment.”<sup>21</sup>

1. Humans are the most critical resources in an organization.
2. Innovation, improvisation, and adaptation are more important than advanced technology.
3. Successful mission accomplishment is more important than adherence to standard military conventions.

To better understand the values and assumptions of Air Commando culture a very brief look at the origin and history of Air Commandos throughout the major conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is necessary. It is a rich heritage much better recorded in several of the documents referenced in the bibliography for those that wish to delve deeper. The rise and fall of AFSOF, like the rest of SOF, and its interaction with the conventional force explains many of the characteristics of the modern day Air Commando. The build up and tear down of the critical

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21. Hoffman, 67.

mission capability and resources of special operations created attitudes and emotions that shape the culture of each of USSOCOM's components.

Unfortunately, the confines of this paper don't allow for a detailed account but each of the three values are clearly demonstrated throughout major US conflicts. More importantly there is a fourth value that becomes evident as the cycle of build ups and draw downs repeats itself. The concept first appears in WWII when the original Air Commandos find themselves supporting the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in Europe and British Brigadier General Orde C. Wingate's "Chindits" in the Pacific. It resurfaces again when Captain Harry "Heinie" Aderholt and his "Kyushu Gypsies" work for the CIA and Far East Command's Liaison Group (FEC/LG) in Korea.<sup>22</sup> The concept finally reaches full maturity by the end of Vietnam. It is best summarized in a passage from *Black Hats and White Hats*, by Lieutenant Colonel Ioannis Koskinas.

Once again, AFSOF crews had to accept that, as "special" as their missions might be, they would have to contend with a conventionally minded Air Force that did not appreciate their contributions to the US national security and, thus, was not willing to support their activities. This inattention and lack of appreciation was deeply ingrained into the AFSOF culture and inculcated into incoming air commandos. The fact that they received little recognition became a badge of honor for AFSOF crews, as they began to see themselves as "special operators" first and "Airmen" second.<sup>23</sup>

The additional fourth value is:

4. Air Commandos see themselves as "special operators" first and "Airmen" second.<sup>24</sup>

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22. Trest, *Air Commando One*, 26.

23. Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 36.

24. There are two additional subcultures that exists within the Air Commando population: 1) Those members that serve in the two overseas groups often see themselves as outsiders to the major AFSOC population. Geographic separation and distant time zones hampers interaction with the HQ and often creates a "forgotten child syndrome." 2) AFSOC aircrew have always been very tribal defining themselves by their airframes and missions. The traditional AF battle of "carnivore" vs "herbivore" is alive and well in AFSOC. Air Commandos talk about the Pave Low or Talon Mafias. The NSAV fleet is generically referred to as the little airplanes. Ideally this paper will generate a cross flow of information that will overcome the "tribes and the "forgotten child."

Whether this is a desirable trait or not is irrelevant.<sup>25</sup> It is one of the unspoken assumptions that is deeply rooted in the psyche of the organization. It affects the daily and long term actions and decisions of the command and it needs to be acknowledged to make lasting and effective changes.

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25. This was a source of consternation throughout the years amongst various commanders. The Air Commando that was heard to refer to the “Big Air Force” or “Big Blue” often earned a stern lecture about being an Airman first.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations of this paper will be framed in a three phased plan; introduce, indoctrinate, and sustain. The emphasis will be on the sustain portion of the plan. It would be easy to make recommendations that don't consider resources, funding or time. This plan attempts to work within existing resources and acknowledge the current operations tempo and manning. The realities are that every formal training course is completely filled with mission essential training. Operations tempo is not going to decrease anytime soon and selection and assessment, the battle cry of the faithful just isn't feasible. The goal is to maximize the impact and efficiency of resources that are already resident in the MAJCOM. While many in AFSOC have operated for years under the premise that selection and assessment is the only valid path to a qualified force the findings of this paper and of others suggests there are other paths that can be just as successful.

## **Introduce**

Formal training for AFSOC aircrew is accomplished at one of three locations. Depending on what airframe an individual is assigned to fly they will go to Hurlburt Field, FL<sup>26</sup>; Kirtland AFB, NM; or Cannon AFB, NM. When a new accession arrives at formal training they receive the Introduction to Special Operations Course (ISOC). It is a three-day course to provide a working knowledge of joint special operations to newly assigned Air Commandos.

ISOC examines the historical evolution, development, organization, and mission activities of US Special Operations Command and its components. It provides a working knowledge of Air Force special operation forces and emphasizes the joint perspective. The course uses personal

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26. With half of the MC-130H/P fleet (and soon the CV-22s) stationed in the two overseas groups, it was possible, even likely that a two-tour Air Commando could be an accomplished operator without ever having set foot on Hurlburt Field, the home of the headquarters. All formal flying training and simulator refresher training was accomplished at Kirtland, and that's exactly what happened for an entire generation of Air Commandos.

accounts from elite AFSOF warriors to analyze select special operations missions. A static display familiarizes students with air and special tactics hardware and capabilities. Range Demonstrations give a visual perspective of AFSOC ground capabilities.<sup>27</sup>

The course gives the candidate a brief view into the community they are about to enter. In years past only aviators were required to attend at the beginning of their flying training and the course was available to other assigned personnel. The single change necessary to maximize the effects of this course is to make it mandatory for all assigned AFSOC personnel within the first six months of assignment. There is an entire population of support personnel that are assigned to AFSOC rather than volunteer. This is also a population that spends far too much of their assignment toiling at their profession never fully understanding the value of their efforts or their contribution to the greater mission.<sup>28</sup> This is the target audience that would benefit from a concise top down review of SOF structure and purpose that ISOC offers. Current AFSOS schedules show the course being offered quarterly at all four of the bases AFSOC occupies. That should allow individuals to accomplish the course within the specified six months. The secondary benefit of the introduction phase coupled with the sustainment phase is the likely increase in multi-term assignments for a population that typically is up and out after a single assignment.

## **Indoctrinate**

Indoctrination should be mandatory for all operators and perhaps even maintenance and intelligence personnel. AFSOC recently developed a program to meet this need. The newly designed Air Commando Basic Course (ACBC) continues to grow and change but continued

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27. AFSOS Home Page, *ISOC Course Description*, <http://www.afsoc.af.mil/usafsos/>

28. The author once developed his own “ISOC-like” brief and presented it to the support personnel resident in the Operational Support Squadron. It was disheartening to witness the lack of SOF knowledge and the number of people that had never heard this basic information in their three-four year assignments. What was gratifying was the number of people attempted to find a second assignment in AFSOC. People thrive when they know their place and their value to the organization.

emphasis should be placed on scenarios requiring teamwork and innovation, stressing the importance of human interaction. The course is currently mandatory for Non-Standard Aviation (NSAv) and designated SOF medical personnel and they must complete ACBC prior to certification as Combat Mission Ready (CMR). This is not intended to be the Air Force version of the Q-Course or BUD/S. The goal is not to screen or discriminate personnel as they have already been assigned to the command, and in the case of the flyers, completed initial qualification training at significant expense. What it does is create a shared experience amongst graduates and appreciation of other special operators they support. The recommendation of this study is that all aircrew and eventually maintainers, intelligence, and designated medical personnel attend the course. Including maintenance and intelligence personnel ties two critical support career fields more closely to the mission they support. It provides lasting lines of communication and interface across functional boundaries early in everyone's career. This is the change in mindset that will require funding, resources, and time to enact. It is not something that will happen overnight but is something the command should strive for. In the meantime there are much smaller steps that can achieve similar results. Including maintenance and intelligence personnel in local aircrew survival exercises can have surprising impact and offer insights that aircrew take for granted. This would offer practical survival skills and mission exposure to non-flyers and present aircrew with the realistic scenario of evading with passengers. Again, there is a secondary benefit to this change in policy. Word will get out through informal channels that there is a challenge to overcome when someone joins AFSOC. Ideally, this will fulfill and enhance Spulak's concept of self selection. The type of people AFSOC seeks will pursue the challenge and prestige of being declared CMR through "trial by fire" will hopefully volunteer for service in AFSOC.

## **Sustain**

Operating under Spulak and Turnley's basic tenets, sustainment is the most influential phase to organizational culture. It is also the cheapest portion to transform. There is an untapped resource existing at the operational level that simply needs to be energized, organized and formalized: The squadron commanders. Squadron commanders are crucial to Air Commando sustainment as they have the most extensive exposure throughout the Air Commando's career. There is no mandate for a squadron commander to establish a specific SOF education program beyond an officer's implicit responsibility to mentor and develop his/her subordinates. That said, an informal and non-scientific polling of a representative sample of current and former squadron commanders shows that these programs exist and in some cases are thriving. Each of the commanders contacted by the author proudly explained the libraries they established, the history they sustained within the unit or the team building exercises they developed. But as more support functions are removed from the squadron level and time becomes an even greater commodity, too often one of the first things to suffer is the "nice to have" programs. If the commanders network was able to share existing briefings, programs, concepts and solutions via a loose official channel the gains could be exponential. There's obviously nothing stopping current commanders from doing that on their own right now, but this study suggests there would be multifaceted gains from a formal internet based information network. The goal is to use a technology network as a tool to empower commanders and their interactions not replace them. Whether it is a community of practice (COP) or social network style application it should be run by the Air Force Special Operations Training Center (AFSOTC). The possibilities of practice are unlimited but some of the immediate benefits are obvious.

1. Ala carte menus of briefings (joint, historical, capabilities, organizational) for use during squadron, group, wing all calls, and wingmen days.
2. AFSOC Commander's SOF specific reading list as well as unit produced book reviews and library inventories.
3. Up to date information from A-Staff directorates within AFSOC HQ
4. AFSOC and USSOCOM Commander updates and special interest items
5. Individual base papers and public affairs stories

Reach back capability would negate time zone and geographical difficulties, as well as ensure the AFSOC Commander had a single point to publish all unclassified guidance and values to each of his commanders. The information would be “pushed” to the commanders rather than “pulled” by them. As well as the ability for squadron commanders to provide timely feedback and questions in forums or message boards. Each commander would receive basic familiarization training during the MAJCOM’s squadron commander course, and the squadron commanders could then pass that training on to their operations officers at the unit.

While having the network managed by AFSOTC, may seem like an increase in workload for one organization, the successful implementation would rely on the existing products and subject matter experts resident in the command. AFSOTC, or one of its subordinate units would simply be the clearing house and validator of an information cooperative. This may oversimplify the actual process but the majority of products placed on the network would be created by the squadron, at the request of AFSOTC, and then submitted for review and release. There are historians, weapons school graduates, tacticians and squadron commanders already creating these documents for use in their organizations. AFSOTC oversight allows the sharing of these products while ensuring they meet command standards and compliment desired Air Commando messages and values.

## **Conclusion**

AFSOF must grow in order to maintain its ability to support its SOF brethren. It is a contract that cannot be broken and AFSOC will not fail. The command will overcome the crisis of its current growth spurt. That is not the issue at hand. The issue is the efficient and effective inculcation of new recruits to AFSOC through a standard institutionalized program that ingrains values and assumptions of Air Commando culture. The answer presumed to be the only solution by many for so many years is not the solution at all. Air Commandos are different from the rest of the Air Force but they are different from their Army, Navy and Marine SOF brethren as well. Selection and assessment is not feasible nor is it necessary to create today's modern day Air Commando. Through a formalized program new recruits to the command will be introduced, indoctrinated, and sustained in Air Commando culture. The Air Commandos will continue to seek out and recruit the best and the brightest from the conventional force and those that are assigned to AFSOC will be welcomed into a community that values humans and the innovation, improvisation and adaptation that ensures that no mission ever fails.

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